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SUBJECT: T&T CIVIL AVIATION DG OPTIMISTIC ABOUT OPEN SKIES AGREEMENT

REF: 07 STATE 146737

11. SUMMARY: The Director General of the Civil Aviation Authority of Trinidad and Tobago expressed optimism that a bilateral Open Skies civil air agreement between the U.S. and Trinidad & Tobago could be reached as early as the end of 2008. END SUMMARY

12. In a meeting with EconOff, Ramesh Lutchmedial, Director General of the Civil Aviation Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, discussed the prospects and process for negotiating an Open Skies Agreement with the U.S. Identifying opposition from British West Indies Airways, now Caribbean Airlines (CAL), as the main reason why previous negotiations had stalled, Lutchmedial stated that with CAL now in favor of an Open Skies Agreement, this barrier had been eliminated. In fact, he believes an agreement could be reached as early as the end of 2008. Lutchmedial noted that, in essence, the U.S. currently enjoys 95 percent of the benefits of an Open Skies Agreement with Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). For CAL, an Open Skies Agreement would significantly improve access to key U.S. markets.

13. Within T&T, aviation negotiations are handled by a special committee made up of representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Civil Aviation Authority, Ministry of Works and Transport, and Caribbean Airlines. The committee is chaired by Justice Cecile Bernard, head of Trinidad and Tobago's Industrial Court and an aviation lawyer. Justice Bernard also chairs the CARICOM committee established to conduct aviation negotiations.

14. Lutchmedial said that an Open Skies Agreement with Europe was discussed at a recent CARICOM meeting in Suriname, but he had recommended that CARICOM first negotiate an agreement with the U.S. Asked whether T&T was interested in pursuing a bilateral Open Skies Agreement, Lutchmedial explained that because CARICOM does not have a legal institution with the authority to conclude regional agreements on behalf of member states, any multilateral agreement would in effect amount to a series of bilateral agreements, requiring the authorization of individual countries.

15. Although Lutchmedial was optimistic that an agreement with the U.S. could be signed by the end of the year, he added that a similar agreement with the United Kingdom had taken five years to conclude and was still awaiting government approval. As an aside, Lutchmedial explained that Trinidad and Tobago's agreement with the UK includes a clause that allows any EU carrier to be designated as a UK vessel for the purposes of transit to T&T. Similarly, any CARICOM vessel can be designated as a T&T vessel. These flights, however, have to be routed through the UK and T&T respectively to benefit from the T&T-UK Open Skies Agreement.

16. COMMENT: Lutchmedial is a reliable, long-term contact; Post is inclined to give credence to his read on prospects for Open Skies. The timing of our offer to negotiate an agreement - on the eve of parliamentary elections and the formation of a new cabinet in

November 2007 - may have precluded a quick response from the GOTT, but if Lutchmedial is correct we could see activity in the near term. Nonetheless, the pace of forward movement here is often glacial, and at times the perceived need to give actions a CARICOM gloss can slow movement. END COMMENT.

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